

TESTIMONY OF THE CONNECTICUT JUSTICE ALLIANCE

Education Committee

SB 1095; An Act Concerning School Resource Officers

IN FAVOR OF SB 1095



March 1, 2023

Dear Co-Chairs Currey & McCrory, Ranking members McCarty & Berthel, and vice-chairs Leeper & Winfield :

My name is Jordyn Wilson and I am a Justice Advisor at the [Connecticut Justice Alliance](#) (CTJA). I'm writing this testimony to communicate my strong support for S.B. 1095, An Act Concerning School Resource Officers, and to make a clear understanding that this bill should also include a phased out approach to the removal of School Resource Officers.

The CTJA is a statewide youth-adult partnership working to end the criminalization of youth. The Alliance includes Justice Staff, Justice Advisors, and Steering Committee members, which include lawyers, researchers, clinicians, and social workers, who work across issues areas such as mental/behavioral health, family advocacy, substance abuse, youth services, LGBTQ+ issues, legal representation, education, community and residential services, and public policy reform.

Growing up in Bridgeport, I never had an encounter with a School Resource Officer (SRO). It wasn't until I moved to Stratford and attended one of their middle schools that I even knew the job existed. My experience with my School Resource Officer was very positive. He was a dedicated individual to his students, offering me a space to decompress in crisis, and often pizza parties for a fantastic week without getting in trouble. My School Resource Officer saved me from being suspended numerous times, and often was right there when I needed him to remind me to make a better choice.

See, regardless of my experience with a positive and influential man, I recognize the detrimental impact of having police in schools for our students. I am not naive to recognize that my experience with a School Resource Officer is not the same for my counterparts, and not fully encompassing the experiences of other students across our state. This bill will provide specificity to the duties of a School Resource Officer at which I support.

Throughout my time with CTJA, we've conducted [vision sessions](#) with SROs and have often heard varying responses as to what they feel their job is in the school system. When asked "What would you say is the purpose of having SROs" we were met with responses such as: "Mentors." "Faculty of the school, or an extension of the administration." "Therapists." "Everything but law enforcement." **This is not okay.** Especially when training and educating is not done to ensure these officials even know what they are doing with our youth. Would you let a nurse perform surgery, or a mechanic pull out your teeth? The duties outlined in our vision sessions by SROs throughout

Connecticut should be done by proper and trained professionals, and this bill should include a component to ensure funding goes to placing these professionals into our school systems. Every dollar spent on an SRO is one less dollar that could go towards proactively and positively supporting our children with data driven solutions.

This bill should also go a step further in including a phased out approach to removing SROs from our schools completely. As mentioned in my testimony earlier, I am not naive in knowing my experience is not the same for others. [In fact, Schools with SROs referred students with disabilities to law enforcement at a rate higher than the overall state average, and Black youth in schools with an SRO are over 3 times more likely to be arrested, or referred to law enforcement. With Latino youth at over 4 times more likely.](#) **This is a racial justice issue that needs to be addressed.** The overpopulation of school resource officers, primarily in urban schools, has impacted children of color more than anyone, and research shows that the presence of SROs in schools increases the likelihood of discipline and arrest for students, primarily those of color, without providing measurably better educational or safety outcomes.

School Resource Officers, with no adequate job description, training, and education are not needed in our school systems. What we need instead are social workers, guidance counselors, **credible messengers**, nurses, health services, and mental health service professionals as mediation specialists, restorative justice trainers, and school climate specialists who can really address the root issues our young people are facing.

I strongly support S.B. 1095. I hope the Committee and Connecticut lawmakers will vote in favor of this bill. Together, we can build an educational system that centers the social-emotional well-being of students through care, resources, learning, and restoration.

In Community,
Jordyn Wilson